

How to become a Guitar Hero 2/06/08

In the interest of full disclosure, I must tell you that I am not much into video games. Unlike my kids, I can only find amusement in these games for a short while. I also must tell you that I am not very musical. Not very musical to the point where my children have lovingly told me to not sing, even in church. So when we got "Guitar Hero III" for Christmas, I thought I would have no interest what so ever. Boy was I wrong.

The night my wife and I first tried to play "Guitar Hero" we kind of stunk. In fact we missed so many "notes", the characters in the game booed us off the stage. And that was at the beginner level! For those of you who are not familiar with this game, you are armed with a "guitar" and have to play the right "notes" as they scroll by you on the screen. This is not as easy as it may sound. Every time you hit a wrong note or have bad timing, the guitar emits a kind of squeak which sounds like a guitar string breaking.

With a plastic guitar slung over my 48 year old shoulder, I tried again. The very first song on the beginner play list was a song I recognized from my high school days, Slow Ride by a group called Foghat. It brought back memories of high school dances and summertime car rides with the windows down and the volume up. Even though I was familiar with the song, my left hand didn't seem to want to fully cooperate with my right hand. I heard a lot of guitar strings breaking, but I was slowing getting better.

By the time I got through Slow Ride without getting booed off the stage, I was starting to get into it. And after hearing Slow Ride that many times, it was definitely time to try a different song! With the new song I again got booed off the stage on my first try, but the second time I got it, and was really excited as I put "DAD" into the hero list. It was time to go to bed, but I was having a good time and wanted to try a song I didn't know, something by Poison, a group I never listen to. Unfortunately I got booed off the stage again.

I found out the hard way that having familiarity with a song really increases your odds of being successful on Guitar Hero III, at least for a teenager from the 70's. The same principle holds true in the work place.

As owners and managers of small businesses, we sometimes throw our employees into the game of interacting with customers and co-workers without much training or practice. I must admit that in the past, I was guilty of doing that to new employees. I was so anxious to

give somebody a fast start, I didn't take the time to properly train them. Those moves ended up costing more in mistakes and distraught employees than I saved in the training budget.

But training can't be boring. New employees can't simply watch experienced people do a task for very long, they have to get their hands on and try. Again that doesn't mean you turn them loose without someone else looking over their shoulder. On Guitar Hero both of our boys were watching us struggle to learn how to play the game. Periodically they would give us tips on how to score more points. It was important to make mistakes because that was the best way for us to learn. We just didn't want to make huge mistakes.

Tonight I took some time to play Guitar Hero again. Yes, I started with Slow Ride, but only because it has been a while since the last time I picked up that plastic guitar. Now that I have gotten through each of the beginner songs, I am ready for the easy songs. Who knows, maybe someday with enough practice, my kids might think I am musical and let me sing in church again.

Small Business Today is a bi-weekly feature written by Tom Friedman, president of 1st National Bank, Ankeny.